

LESSONS FROM FINLAND

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After the start of liberalization in 1990's, the Indian Government has deliberately and drastically cut funds to Government Schools – debilitating and worsening their quality. After degrading and making them non-functional the Government is now all out to selling Municipal Schools to private and religious trust thus reneging from its responsibility. To appease powerful Government employees and to contain emerging rural discontent as tokenism it opened a few Kendriya Vidyalaya and Navodaya Vidyalayas – which accommodate hardly 1% of the total school children.

There are few lessons to be learnt from Finland. This country has kept its faith intact in Public Education. Today Finland is the topmost country in the world in terms of school performance. Their educational system was quite in shambles 30 years back. In 1980, Finland with a small population of 5.5-million decided to fix its education. They shut down all the private teacher training institutes and entrusted this job to eight central universities. Finland decided to do away with private schools and give all its children – rich, poor or with different abilities the same high quality education. In this small Scandinavian country there was a sense of deep equity and justice. In this inclusive learning the emphasis was on cooperation and not competition.

The first thing Finland did was to raise the social status of teachers. Today the best job a youngster can aspire for in Finland is to become an Elementary School Teacher. No wonder those whose score the top 10% in secondary schools compete hard to become teachers. It is equivalent to cracking the IIT entrance in India. The training is extremely rigorous. Teachers need a master's degree; they do research and learn the best educational practices. As an Elementary School Teacher in Finland (social status of an MBBS, IAS in India) your marriage prospects shoot sky high!

All schools and boards in India are infatuated with exams and results and not in real learning. In the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation process instituted by the CBSE the teacher spends most of her time filling worthless, inane forms and is left with little time for creative teaching. The opposite is true in Finland. There are minimal or no exams until the age of 16; and there is full autonomy given to teachers and schools.

The Finns believed that schools were places for children to have fun and to discover what they liked. So why burden them with silly tests. They improved their teaching force, limited students testing to a minimum, and placed responsibility before accountability on teachers. Teachers learn from better teachers and schools learn from better schools. All teachers in Finland are unionized.

Many countries have taken a different path in educational reform with disastrous results. To make schools better some have instituted tough measures. They have tightened control over schools, biometric attendance, and stronger accountability for student performance, increasing the number of school hours, firing bad teachers etc. But have these alien, borrowed measures worked? They have drastically failed and policing has caused more distrust among the teachers.

Finnish Lessons – a book by Pasi Sahlberg sums up some important lessons we can learn from this small country. One of the toughest tests in the world is PISA – *Programme for International Student Assessment* which tests the scholastic performance of 15-year olds in mathematics, science and reading. PISA started in 2000 and repeats the test every 3 years. The Finns never believed in such tests to start with. But 10 years back they let the Finnish kids appear for PISA, perhaps just out of curiosity to see where they stand internationally. There was a big surprise in store. The Finnish children topped – year after year. The other countries which came close to Finland were South Korea, Japan and China. These countries are known for their “cram shops” (the Kota Model in India) and place enormous burden on their children. In 2009 for the first time India participated in PISA. They set their best foot forward by fielding children from Tamil Nadu and Himachal – two states which have the best Public Education system. The results were disastrous. Out of 74 countries which participated, Indian students stood right at the bottom just one notch above Kazakhstan.

There are a few videos on Finland's Revolutionary Education System

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ua0hEH1d2OQ>

Pasi Sahlberg's Ted Talk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdgS--9Zg_0

Finland's free and equal education for all

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EqBvmB7gfs>

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